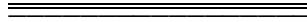
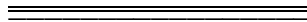


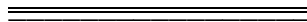
**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



**Traffic Safety Through Education and Enforcement**



**A Leadership White Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Required for Graduation from the  
Leadership Command College**



**By  
William F. McAnally Jr.**

**Texarkana Texas Police Department  
Texarkana, Texas  
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## **ABSTRACT**

There is a large problem in the United States with the number of people that are killed in vehicle crashes. In the years ranging from 2016 to 2018, the average number of people killed on US highways is 37,279, or 102 per day (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, n.d.). That is a 13% increase in people killed in crashes since 2015. If one looks at the number of people who are murdered in the same three-year period, the average is 14,878 (FBI UCR, 2016, 2017, 2018). These numbers show that a person is 85% more likely to die in a crash on a U.S. highway than murdered.

Another aspect of a vehicle crash is to examine is the economic loss involved. In 2018, the economic loss associated with vehicle crashes in Texas alone was \$39.6 billion (Texas Department of Transportation, 2019). Part of this problem can be attributed to public perception of traffic enforcement. Studies have shown that the public views enforcement as a revenue generator or a quota system (Surratt, 1999).

Law enforcement agencies should increase traffic safety through progressive education of the public and aggressive enforcement efforts. The public education can be done in many ways, including media campaigns, community outreach, and traffic safety programs. Public education has shown to be effective in reducing crashes, especially when partnered with enforcement efforts.

Another way to increase enforcement is to have directed patrols in high crash and high crime areas. This dual focus helps with reducing other crimes through high visibility enforcement efforts thus making the streets and the community safer overall. This will help change public perception and help build partnerships with the citizens.

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## INTRODUCTION

Society in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has created a population that has become desensitized to people getting killed or hurt in vehicle crashes. The motoring public in general is always in a hurry and has little regard for the traffic laws thus reducing the safety of others on the road. The general disregard for traffic laws and other people on the road has become part of the culture. One of the biggest things in this culture is the thought that speeding is okay. There have been some groups formed that promote speeding and discourage enforcement of the speed laws. (Sprattler, 2012). At the National Forum on Speeding, in 2005, safety leaders adopted an agenda for addressing the speed problem but not much has been done since, except increasing speed limits (Sprattler, 2012). Speeding is not a new problem for the United States, given that the first person to be charged with speeding was a New York cab driver in 1899 that was doing twelve miles per hour in an eight mile per hour zone (Sprattler, 2012). To change this mindset, there will have to be a change in the way the motoring public thinks about driving. This necessitates the need for aggressive enforcement efforts on United States' highways, but only after educating the public for the reason behind aggressive enforcement.

The number of people who are killed on Texas roads can be reduced through education of the motoring public and officers who enforce traffic laws. The other part of reducing the number of fatalities is through an aggressive enforcement effort. Statistics have shown in past years that public education efforts about traffic safety (i.e. "Click it or Ticket", "Save a Life", "Look Twice") have helped reduce the number of crash related fatalities (Pence's work, Making Safety a Cultural Priority, 2011). Campaigns such as

the “Click it or Ticket” campaign have helped increase the daytime seatbelt use to approximately 94% (Making Safety a Cultural Priority, 2011). Public education campaigns combined with aggressive enforcement efforts have caused a reduction in the number of crash related deaths even more in past years. Data analysis programs have shown a correlation between areas of high crash rates and areas of high crime (IADLEST, 2012). Therefore, implementing aggressive enforcement efforts directed at reducing crashes can also help reduce other non-traffic related crimes in these areas. For the listed reasons, law enforcement agencies should increase traffic safety through education and aggressive enforcement.

## **POSITION**

According to the Texas Department of Transportation (Irene Webster “Personal communication” 2020), an average of 3,723 people were killed in vehicle crashes on Texas roads each year from 2016 to 2018. That equates to 10.2 people per day in Texas. The last day that nobody died in a vehicle crash on a Texas road was November 7, 2000 (Texas Department of Transportation, 2019). The Fatality Accident Reporting System (FARS) Encyclopedia showed the national average for the same time frame is 37,279, which is an average of 102 people who were killed in crashes every day on U.S. highways (National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, n.d.). When comparing the average number of people who are killed in crashes in the U.S. (37,279), to the average number of people who were murdered in the U.S. (14,878), during the same time period (2016-2018), it shows 85% more people are killed in crashes (FBI, 2020). From 2005 to 2011, there was a 25% decrease in the number of people killed in vehicle crashes on U.S. roads (Making Safety a Cultural Priority, 2011).

This, in part, was attributed to traffic safety media campaigns along with a slow economy during those years (Making Safety a Cultural Priority, 2011). The numbers of people killed did not fluctuate much until 2015, when the numbers started to climb again, with a 13% increase in the number of people killed in 2018 (The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, n.d.). This increase can be attributed to the mindset of the motoring public as well as a lack of enforcement efforts by law enforcement agencies (The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, n.d.). This needs to be addressed on the law enforcement side as well so that officers understand it is still effective to stop someone and issue a warning.

The motoring public also needs to be educated on the economic loss associated with vehicle crashes. The loss in Texas was \$39.6 billion in 2018, that is an increase of 46% since 2003 (Texas Department of Transportation, 2019). Another economic consideration is the increased insurance costs for everyone. Car insurance premiums, in part, are based on the number of crashes that occur in a geographical area (Insurance Information Institute, 2020). If an area has a high crash number, insurance companies will charge more for insurance premiums, as opposed to an area that has low crash numbers. This is a fact most members of the motoring public are unaware of. Educating drivers can be accomplished through media releases, student driver education, and community event attendance. Departments can increase education efforts by partnering with groups like MADD, TXDOT, and local Traffic Safety Coalitions.

Agencies and officers also need to be educated in the need for increased traffic safety and what that entails. Many times, agencies do not allocate the resources needed to effectively address traffic issues such as crashes and bad drivers.

Sometimes, this is due to manpower shortages or budget shortages, and, other times, traffic enforcement is not considered important. Therefore, resources are directed toward routine and criminal patrols. When officers are working criminal patrols, they generally use traffic violations to make stops on vehicles they want or need to contact for reasons other than the violation. When officers assigned to traffic units are out working, they are not just writing tickets, they are also catching other criminals and recovering property as well. Traffic officers recover stolen vehicles, weapons, drugs, and wanted fugitives in their daily traffic enforcement activities. Traffic officers can also be readily available to assist with other calls when beat officers are tied up.

One way to approach the dilemma of manpower and budget shortages is DDACTS. DDACTS stands for Data Driven Approach to Crime and Traffic Safety (IADLEST, 2012). The DDACTS model was developed by several federal agencies in partnership with state and local agencies (Coyle & Purdy, 2020). This initiative has been growing since 2009 and is being implemented by several large and small agencies nationwide. DDACTS focuses on the collaboration of the community and law enforcement to reduce social harm by promoting high visibility traffic enforcement in communities (Coyle & Purdy, 2020). The principle behind the DDACTS model is the study of high crime areas and high crash areas as well as the correlation between the two (Coyle & Purdy, 2020). When studying these areas from an analyst standpoint, the use of heat maps for these areas have often been found to line up (Coyle & Purdy, 2020). By using this model, law enforcement agencies can focus directed patrols to the areas where there are high numbers of crashes and high crime. If an agency has a traffic unit, they can be directed to use high visibility enforcement in the areas indicated.

With the increased presence in the area, the traffic officers are not only reducing crashes and traffic violations, but they are catching other criminals and reducing other crimes in that area.

Several agencies that have started using DDACTS have experienced a reduction in both crimes and crashes. In one year, time, Evesham, New Jersey experienced a moderate decrease in crashes and an exceptional decrease in burglaries (Coyle & Purdy, 2020). Because of past budget issues Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey started using the DDACTS model to help distribute manpower better (Coyle & Purdy, 2020). In January 2014 Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey experienced a substantial decrease in burglaries and the department attributed the decrease to DDACTS (Coyle & Purdy, 2020). In January and February of 2012, the Philadelphia Police Department experienced a substantial decrease in violent crime in the selected test area that was attributed to use of the DDACTS model (Coyle & Purdy, 2020).

## **COUNTER ARGUMENTS**

Historically, the general public has viewed traffic enforcement with varied opinions. In a study by Sugarland Texas Police Department “When asked about the “drive” behind traffic enforcement, a segment of the public has been known to equate traffic enforcement to revenue generation, while others believe a “quota system” exists” (Surratt, 1999, p. 5). Although traffic enforcement has traditionally been viewed as a waste of resources by parts of the motoring public, it is still a vital function. Some in the public believe the resources should be focused on reactive or criminal patrols catching burglars, murderers, and drug users.



A study conducted by the Governors Highway Safety Association found that the general motoring public does not see a problem with speeding and in some cases, promotes speeding and non-enforcement (Alanis, 2005). In this study, 42 representatives indicated a belief that there is a cushion of five to ten miles per hour not only in the minds of the public but also in enforcement practices (Alanis, 2005). This was disputed by some agencies involved in the study, while others said it was common practice (Alanis, 2005). The Houston Chronicle contacted several agencies, such as the Texas Department of Public Safety, Houston Police Department, and Harris County Sheriff's Department, who all stated they do not have a policy to give a cushion (Alanis, 2005). GHSA chairman, Jim Champagne, stated "Law enforcement (officials) need to be given the political will to enforce speed limits, and the public must get the message that speeding will not be tolerated," (Alanis, 2005, para. 2). Representatives from the states involved in this study were asked what they saw as the largest obstacles to speed enforcement and they listed public indifference to speeding as #1 followed by public perception that speed enforcement is a revenue generator at #2 (Sprattler, 2012). While speed is a big contributor to crash related deaths, public perception of what is okay while driving has a large effect on that.

AAA (2019) conducted the 2018 Traffic Safety Culture Index study. Of the drivers surveyed, only 54% thought it was dangerous to drive over 15 miles per hour above the posted speed limit (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, 2019). Talking on a cell phone was only seen as dangerous by 50% of those surveyed while 76% thought texting or reading on a phone was dangerous (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, 2019). Running a red light when there was time to stop was considered dangerous by only

57% of those surveyed (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, 2019). These answers should be alarming to anyone who drives on the road.

While the motoring public's perception of what is acceptable as driving habits gets worse, those that are involved in traffic safety need to come up with a way to change the mindset of the motoring public. One way of doing this is to educate the motoring public about the causes of crashes, economic loss, and why enforcement of traffic laws is necessary. As stated above, many drivers do not fear getting stopped because of the belief that officers will not stop motorists if they stay within the window of five to ten miles per hour over the posted limit. That is a big misconception and must be addressed. One way to address this misconception is to stop drivers in that range and issue warnings with guidance on the dangers of speeding.

While law enforcement agencies struggle with trying to reduce the number of crash related deaths, they must come up with a plan that increases traffic safety while addressing other community concerns. Traffic safety plans generally involve aggressive enforcement. Aggressive enforcement should be complimented with a progressive public awareness campaign that promotes understanding and elicits support of law enforcement efforts to improve the safety of the motoring public. If a law enforcement agency gains the support of the public for its traffic safety plan and enforcement efforts, the public knowledge then becomes a deterrence by increasing public awareness.

Another issue that counters aggressive traffic enforcement is the mindset of officers. While some officers lack motivation, some just see traffic enforcement as a punitive aspect of their job. As stated in a Traffic Safety Institute article, "The extent of the true effect that law enforcement will have on the behavior of the drivers depends

upon what the drivers think the police will do, or upon the reputation of the police for taking enforcement action.” (Surratt’s work, *Positive Aspects of Aggressive Traffic Enforcement*, 1999, pg. 4, para. 2). Younger officers sometimes get caught up in the “I want to catch bad guys” attitude and show very little interest in traffic enforcement. Some even think traffic enforcement is not real police work. Surratt (1999) states that “Proactive traffic enforcement is an effective strategy to protect the public from the devastation caused by street and highway traffic-related death and injury, drug abuse, illegal trafficking in and possession of weapons, continued freedom of fugitives, and to otherwise promote and maintain an orderly and law-abiding society” (p. 9). He goes on to say “There is a need to sensitize public officials, the media, and the public to the crime-deterrent effects of traffic enforcement” (Surratt, 1999, p. 10). Through education of the younger officers and buy-in from administration, programs like DDACTS could be used to change the mindset of these officers to see that traffic enforcement can be used to catch bad guys, like Timothy McVeigh (Oklahoma City bomber). These officers can be shown that McVeigh was stopped for a minor traffic violation, and the stop snowballed into him being arrested for weapons violations and later charged in the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City. Getting the less motivated officers involved can be done through education as well.

The final counter point that needs to be addressed is cost. A lot of agencies these days are faced with budget cuts and funds being diverted to other programs that are deemed more important to the community (Coyle & Purdy, 2020). Most agencies would need little or no budget increase to implement aggressive enforcement efforts. If an agency has a traffic unit already in place, they could assign the unit to directed

enforcement efforts in high crime/crash areas. If they do not have an assigned traffic unit the agency could seek funding through grants for enforcement efforts, such as the Selective Traffic Enforcement Program grants offered by the Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT). Grants such as these will pay officers to work traffic enforcement in high crime/ crash areas. Another thing to remember is that with increased enforcement comes increased revenue. While these programs do not require officers to write citations any longer, the officers having discretion in enforcement will generally have better productivity. The productivity measure is based on contacts rather than tickets, which should help dispel the thoughts of quotas or revenue generation.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The chance of being killed in a vehicle crash on highways in the United States is 85% higher than the chance of being murdered (FBI UCR, 2016, 2017, 2018). Law enforcement must do all they can to reduce the number of deaths occurring on United States highways. Law enforcement agencies should increase traffic safety through progressive education of the public and aggressive enforcement efforts. These programs would increase traffic enforcement through directed patrols in areas that have a high number of crashes as well as high crime areas. This has a two-fold effect in that it reduces crashes and reduces other crimes in these areas, due to visible presence.

The progressive education program should be done on a public level as well as an internal level so that it is accepted and effective by both sides. This can be accomplished with the public through media campaigns, citizen interaction with officers, and community events. The education for the officer involvement can be completed

through roll call or specialized training to give the officers the tools and motivation they need.

By having aggressive enforcement in these areas, a department will be able to reduce the number of crashes that involve injury or death. While having increased enforcement and reducing the total number of crashes, officers will also be reducing other crime in these areas such as theft, burglary, robbery, and narcotics activity. This will also have an effect on reducing the economic loss associated with both crashes and crime.

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